

State of the County Address
Williamson County / Franklin Chamber of Commerce
July 28, 2009

WILLIAMSON COUNTY, ALONG WITH THE REST OF THE WORLD, HAS CHANGED A LOT SINCE OUR “STATE OF THE COUNTY” ADDRESS LAST YEAR - FROM A CLIMATE OF GROWTH, NEW JOBS, INCREASING PROPERTY VALUES TO A VALLEY OF CAUTION AT ALL POINTS.

WE HAVE OBSERVED FIRST-HAND FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS ON THE NATIONAL LEVEL FAIL. WE HAVE WATCHED MAJOR CORPORATIONS STOCK VALUES PLUMMET TO THE POINT OF BANKRUPTCIES AND RE-ORGANIZATIONS. OUR NATIONAL UNEMPLOYMENT IS AT A RECORD HIGH; HEALTH CARE IS A MAJOR TOPIC OF CONVERSATION AT EVERY COFFEE SHOP AND, HERE IN TENNESSEE, THE STATE BUDGET IS CHANGING MONTHLY, AS THEY CONTINUOUSLY REVIEW THEIR REVENUE STREAM.

ALL OF THESE CHANGES THROUGHOUT OUR COUNTRY AND OUR STATE HAVE AFFECTED US HERE IN WILLIAMSON COUNTY. DURING THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS, WE HAVE PREPARED OUR BUDGETS CAUTIOUSLY AND CONSERVATIVELY. WE HAVE HELD THE REINS ON OPERATING INCREASES, NEW CAPITAL EXPENDITURES AND NEW PERSONNEL REQUESTS. WE CONTINUE TO CONCENTRATE

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ON HOLDING ON TO OUR FUND BALANCES, RUNNING A LEAN GOVERNMENT, LIVING WITHIN OUR MEANS AND SERVING OUR COUNTY'S NEEDS. WE HAVE TRIED TO BE GOOD STEWARDS OF NOT ONLY THE PRESENT TAXPAYERS' DOLLARS, BUT ALSO THE FUTURE.

WE OBTAIN BETTER RESULTS WHEN THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH AND THE LEGISLATIVE BRANCH RESPECT EACH OTHER. WORKING THROUGH OUR BUDGET COMMITTEE AND THE COUNTY COMMISSION, A GOOD BALANCE OF MUTUAL COOPERATION AND RESPECT IS COMMUNICATED. ALL ELECTED AND APPOINTED OFFICIALS AND OUR DEPARTMENT HEADS HAVE BEEN A PART OF THE SOLUTION. EACH OF THEM DID THEIR PART TO ENSURE THAT NO TAX INCREASE WAS NEEDED OR OCCURRED FOR THE 2009-10 BUDGET. AND THANKS TO THESE EFFORTS AND EVERYONE'S HARD WORK, THE COUNTY COMMISSION APPROVED THE BUDGET FOR THE 7TH YEAR IN A ROW THAT WILL NOT REQUIRE A PROPERTY TAX INCREASE. OUR TAX RATE REMAINS THE SAME AT \$2.31.

IN PREPARING THE CURRENT BUDGET FOR 2009-10, WE LOOKED AND REVIEWED OBJECTIVE DATA BEFORE FINALIZING OUR NUMBERS. I THINK ALL OF US WOULD AGREE THAT IT IS THE TIME TO UTILIZE CONSERVATIVE PRINCIPLES AND NUMBERS IN A TIGHT ECONOMY.

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WE NEED TO SPEND TAXPAYERS' MONEY WISELY AND CAREFULLY. AS YOU CAN SEE FROM THE DATA, THE PERCENTAGE OF STATE AND FEDERAL DOLLARS RECEIVED IN THE PAST ARE GOING TO BE ABOUT THE SAME IN THE FUTURE. LIKEWISE, OVER THE PAST 7 YEARS, WE HAVE FOCUSED OUR ATTENTION IN THE COUNTY'S GENERAL FUND IN REDUCING GOVERNMENT SPENDING.

THE TOTAL COUNTY BUDGET IS SMALLER THAN LAST YEAR'S BUDGET. WE HAVE REDIRECTED THOSE PERCENTAGE OF DOLLARS TO OUR #1 QUALITY OF LIFE ATTRACTION - OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS. THE SCHOOL BUDGET IS UP SLIGHTLY TO ALLOW FOR GROWTH AND THE REST OF THE COUNTY BUDGET IS DOWN. THERE ARE A LOT OF THINGS WE WOULD LIKE TO DO, BUT WE CAN'T AS A COUNTY. WE WILL LIVE WITHIN OUR MEANS AGAIN THIS YEAR. THIS WILL BE ACCOMPLISHED AGAIN BY OUR EMPLOYEES, LOCAL ELECTED AND APPOINTED LEADERS. EVEN DURING THESE TOUGH TIMES, WE CANNOT LOSE OUR "MOMENTUM MISSION" OF BEING THE BEST COUNTY IN THE STATE IN WHICH TO LIVE, WORK, WORSHIP, PLAY AND RAISE OUR FAMILIES. OUR SCHOOLS MUST CONTINUE TO SHINE IN THE STATE, THE REGION AND THE NATION. WE HAVE TO CONTINUE TO PREPARE OUR CHILDREN FOR THE FUTURE.

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AS YOU HAVE HEARD ME SAY BEFORE, WILLIAMSON COUNTY IS THE ONLY COUNTY IN THE STATE WITH A MOODY'S Aaa BOND RATING. IN FACT, WE ARE ONE OUT OF 48 COUNTIES THROUGHOUT THE UNITED STATES WITH THAT DISTINCT RANKING. AS QUOTED IN THE JANUARY, 2009, BOND RATING ".....MOODY'S EXPECTS THE COUNTY'S FINANCIAL POSITION TO REMAIN STRONG, GIVEN A LONG TREND OF HEALTHY RESERVE LEVELS, CONSERVATIVE BUDGETING AND STEADY REVENUE."

OUR COUNTY'S FINANCIAL STRUCTURE AND FUND BALANCES ARE ON SOLID GROUND.

WILLIAMSON COUNTY HAS A SUBSTANTIAL AMOUNT OF FLEXIBILITY IN OUR TAX STRUCTURE:

*OUT OF THE 57 COUNTIES IN TENNESSEE THAT HAVE A WHEEL TAX, 41 ARE HIGHER - 9 HAVE THE SAME AND 6 ARE LOWER THAN WILLIAMSON COUNTY.

*OF THE 95 COUNTIES IN THE STATE, OUR PROPERTY TAX RATE RANKS 44TH.

*OUR SALES TAX RATE IS LOWER THAN 54 COUNTIES IN THE STATE, WITH 33 OF THE OTHER COUNTIES BEING THE SAME AS OURS AND 7 ARE LOWER.

ON AVERAGE, TENNESSEE COUNTIES ALLOCATE 40% OF THEIR PROPERTY TAXES INTO THE GENERAL OPERATING FUND; IN WILLIAMSON COUNTY ONLY 21% IS ALLOCATED TO THE GENERAL FUND. WILLIAMSON COUNTY RANKS 6TH OUT OF THE 95 COUNTIES, IN EFFICIENCY OF RUNNING COUNTY GOVERNMENT.

FROM AN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STANDPOINT, I BELIEVE THAT HELPING TO FIND AND RETAIN JOBS IN OUR COUNTY IS THE NUMBER ONE PRIORITY. I REALIZE THAT PEOPLE HAVE CHOICES WHERE THEY WANT TO LOCATE THEIR BUSINESS. WORKING THROUGH THE EFFORTS OF THE COUNTY'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL, A NEW STRATEGIC PLAN WAS DEVELOPED THAT WILL HELP US TO POSITION OUR COUNTY AND REGION FOR YEARS TO COME. CURRENTLY, 13 OF THE 27 LARGEST PUBLICLY TRADED COMPANIES IN THE REGION CALL WILLIAMSON COUNTY HOME, INCLUDING 7 OUT OF THE TOP TEN.

COMMUNITY HEALTH SYSTEMS (CHS) CONTINUES TO GROW AND IS THE LARGEST PRIVATE SECTOR EMPLOYER IN THE COUNTY, WITH 1,550 EMPLOYEES.

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ANOTHER SUCCESS STORY STARTED IN WILLIAMSON COUNTY IN 2001 WHEN BIOMIMETIC THERAPUETICS WAS FOUNDED WITH JUST 6 EMPLOYEES. TODAY, THEY ARE 1 OF 4 PUBLICLY TRADED BIOTECH COMPANIES IN TENNESSEE. THEY CURRENTLY EMPLOY 95 PEOPLE AND ARE MOVING THEIR CONTRACT MANUFACTURING OPERATION FROM GREAT BRITAIN TO WILLIAMSON COUNTY IN 2010.

OUR ENTREPRENEUR WORKFORCE IS HARD AT WORK. SINCE JULY OF 2008, APPROXIMATELY 1,100 NEW BUSINESS APPLICATIONS HAVE BEEN FILED WITH THE COUNTY CLERK'S OFFICE. OUR ENTREPRENEUR WORKFORCE IS NOW AT 21%. I ENCOURAGE YOU TO GO TO THE NEW WEBSITE (WWW.WILLIAMSONPROSPERS.COM) TO SEE THE CURRENT PROJECT ACTIVITIES.

LET'S QUICKLY HIGHLIGHT SOME PROJECTS AND PARTNERSHIPS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTY.

- AS A MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES (NACo), WE WERE ABLE TO PARTNER FOR A DISCOUNT PRESCRIPTION PROGRAM AND AT NO COST TO OUR TAXPAYERS, AVAILABLE AT LOCAL PHARMACIES FOR OUR COUNTY RESIDENTS.

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- WILLIAMSON COUNTY PARTNERS WITH THE TRANSPORTATION MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION (TMA) GROUP TO PROVIDE ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL SOLUTIONS FOR THE AREA.

- OUR EMPLOYEES CONTINUE TO FOCUS THEIR EFFORTS TO SECURE MORE GRANT FUNDS, RESULTING IN THE RECEIPT OF APPROXIMATELY \$875,000 ADDITIONAL FEDERAL AND STATE GRANTS FOR OUR COUNTY.

- PARTNERING WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS FROM THE CITY OF FRANKLIN, OUR COMMISSION HAS AUTHORIZED THE PROCEDURES FOR OBTAINING A LONG-TERM WASTEWATER SOLUTION FOR APPROXIMATELY 450 FAMILIES IN THE MEADOWGREEN/GRASSLAND AREA.

- WE HAVE PARTNERED WITH THE GREATER NASHVILLE REGIONAL COUNCIL TO ADMINISTER \$471,000 IN TENNESSEE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT AGENCY HOME LOAN GRANT FUNDS TO HELP RESIDENTS WHO NEED STRUCTURAL AND/OR CODE REPAIRS TO THEIR HOMES. WE RECENTLY CLOSED OUT A SIMILAR \$488,000 GRANT IN WHICH WE WERE SUCCESSFUL IN ASSISTING EIGHT (8) LOCAL RESIDENTS. ANYONE KNOWING OF CITIZENS WHO MIGHT QUALIFY BASED ON INCOME ARE ENCOURAGED TO CONTACT OUR OFFICE.

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WE HAVE PARTNERED WITH APPROXIMATELY 75 MEN AND WOMEN THROUGHOUT OUR COMMUNITY TO SERVE ON TWO (2) SEPARATE ON-GOING TASK FORCES.

THE ANIMAL CONTROL PUBLIC TASK FORCE, CHAIRED BY COUNTY COMMISSIONER JUDY HAYES, IS STUDYING WAYS TO IMPROVE OUR ANIMAL CONTROL SERVICES AND ISSUES IN OUR COUNTY.

THE PUBIC SAFETY TASK FORCE, CHAIRED BY VONA WILSON, IS STUDYING WAYS TO ADDRESS LONG TERM PUBLIC SAFETY SERVICES AND ISSUES IN OUR COUNTY.

PROPERTY ASSESSOR, DENNIS ANGLIN AND OUR INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY STAFF HAVE PARTNERED WITH FRANKLIN AND BRENTWOOD, TO PROVIDE OBLIQUE PHOTOGRAPHY SERVICES WHICH WILL ALLOW US TO SEE 3-DIMENSIONAL AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHY AND ASSIST IN APPRAISALS, MAPPING AND EMERGENCY SERVICES.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR, JOE HORNE IS CHAIRING THE 2010 CENSUS COUNTS COMMITTEE AND IS LOOKING FOR RECOMMENDATIONS FROM OUR MUNICIPAL LEADERS TO PARTNER IN A SUCCESSFUL CENSUS AS ANOTHER MEANS OF INCREASING FEDERAL TAX DOLLARS TO OUR COUNTY AND CITIES.

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IN THESE TIGHT ECONOMIC TIMES, OUR DEPARTMENT HEADS HAVE IDENTIFIED WAYS TO MAKE NEEDED IMPROVEMENTS TO PROGRAMS AND FACILITIES, WHILE KEEPING A WATCHFUL EYE AND FOCUSING ON THE MOST EFFICIENT USE OF THE DOLLARS ALLOCATED FOR THESE PROJECTS.

- ROBERT A. RING INDOOR SOCCER ARENA;
- HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT (DEBT FREE);- pause & ad lib here for 3 slides -
- HISTORIC COURTHOUSE. - pause & ad lib here for 3 slides -

THE COUNTY'S LANDFILL IS A MODEL WHICH RESEARCHERS ARE REVIEWING TO DETERMINE IF OUR AERATION PROCESS WOULD BE A BETTER PRACTICE TO PREPARE BIOMASS FROM LANDFILLS FOR ENERGY PRODUCTION.

KEEP WILLIAMSON BEAUTIFUL, THROUGH WILLIAMSON RECYCLES, IS PARTNERING WITH AREA BUSINESSES FOR A "LIVING GREEN EXPO" TO HELP OUR RESIDENTS FOCUS ON ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY PRODUCTS AND SERVICES, TO BE HELD AT THE FACTORY AUGUST 29TH. I ENCOURAGE YOU TO ATTEND THIS FREE EVENT, OPEN TO THE PUBLIC.

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OUR COUNTY HAS THE DISTINCTION OF BEING THE FIRST IN THE COUNTRY TO RECEIVE A MILITARY AFFILIATE RADIO SYSTEM CALL SIGN WHICH ALLOWS FOR OUR COUNTY TO OPERATE ON AN ALTERNATE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE FREQUENCY, WHEN NEEDED DURING A DECLARED DISASTER.

I KNOW THERE ARE MANY MORE EXAMPLES OF PARTNERSHIPS I COULD SHARE WITH YOU THAT YOU WOULD FIND INTERESTING, BUT TIME SIMPLY WILL NOT ALLOW US TODAY. I DO HOWEVER, WANT TO SHARE SOME CLOSING DATA THAT DR. MATTHEW MURRAY, UT ECONOMIST, RECENTLY PROVIDED IN HIS JULY, 2009, FORECAST ENTITLED, "THE LONG ROAD TO RECOVERY". DR. MURRAY PREDICTS THAT IT WILL BE SOMETIME IN 2011 OR 2012 BEFORE THE REVENUES RETURN TO THEIR 2008 LEVELS FOR THE STATE, THE COUNTY AND OUR MUNICIPALITIES. WHETHER HE IS ON TARGET, OR SLIGHTLY OFF, ONLY TIME WILL TELL. BUT, I KNOW THAT REGARDLESS OF THE TIME FRAME, WE AS BUSINESS AND GOVERNMENT LEADERS, TAXPAYERS, SHAREHOLDERS, AND CEO'S MUST ALL CONTINUE TO PARTNER TOGETHER TO RESTORE THE SYSTEMS THAT MAKE OUR COUNTRY, OUR STATE AND OUR COUNTY STRONG AGAIN.

THANK YOU FOR COMING TODAY AND THANK YOU FOR ALLOWING ME TO SERVE AS YOUR COUNTY MAYOR.